

Ep. 31: Let's talk about human trafficking

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Good day gladiators, thank you for listening to another episode of the Sword and Shield podcast. It's Frances Martinez, director of psychological health for the 960th Cyberspace Wing here with two guests on the line from the Rape Crisis Center. We have Jasmine Chavira and Joana Licon. Thank you girls for joining us today. - Hi, thanks for having us. - For having us. - And so all the gladiators know why we are having the Rape Crisis Center join us on this podcast. So January is national slavery and human trafficking prevention month. And myself I thought about human trafficking and just really didn't think about it happening in the States. You know, I didn't feel like, you know it was a problem that we had here but apparently this is a huge problem. Like I read about 40.3 million people a year are trafficked. - Yeah, and actually within the state of Texas alone there's two different types of human trafficking. You've got labor trafficking and you've also got sex trafficking. And within the state of Texas alone there are about 234,000 victims of labor trafficking at any time. And then for sex trafficking you've got about 79,000 youth minors who are sex trafficked in Texas at any time. So yeah, it's definitely prevalent here in Texas and here in our communities around us. - So can you talk a little bit more about like the forced labor piece of the trafficking and what that looks like, what it means? So our listeners have some idea of what it really is. - Yeah, so for slavery is really interesting because it's really common but not a lot of people know about it. So basically a person to be forced against their own will to be working for someone and that could be just basic labor. There's also foreign labor trafficking where an individual is coerced or forced to move countries to work here. And then as well as like there could be a combination of both, forced and sex labor but a lot of people don't know because when they're trafficked from another country, you don't know who that person is. They usually keep them in their own home. And the forcing to do things. Forced labor can also mean, they could be forced to do labor and be paid less than minimum wage. And that's also considered trafficking. - Okay, and how do people get trafficked? How does that even happen? - Usually it happens by different ways. We like to think of like, just thinking about like how a trafficker would think about how to like lure their victims. And this is very different for every individual. The trafficker kind of observes that person for a while sometimes and knows what they're lacking. Sometimes it could be a person that's in need of money. And so they'll use that to coerce them to like come work for them, by giving them money. Sometimes it could be that person likes to use drugs and they'll use that to lure them in. They used to using like a boyfriend technique that like trust dependency. They build their trust. They know who they are. They know who they surround

themselves, lure them in, isolate them from their families. And then eventually have them depend on them so that it's harder for them to go back to their families to their own country, to where their safe spot is. - Okay, and so there, it sounds like there are a lot of different indicators that a predator looks for in a victim. Yes, definitely. It could be money, drugs, food, shelter, clothing. Anything, it's not really limited to the... Like I said, they sometimes study them for a while. They're very, some are individuals and once they know what they're needing in their life they kind of lure them in. Okay, and then as far as like the sex trafficking, you know I've seen on TV where kids are just snatched up, you know they're with their parents in the parking lot somewhere and they're snatched up and, you know, kidnapped, I mean are we talking like that's how generally they are brought into, you know sex trafficking or are they, you know preyed on as a forced labor individuals. It could be a number of factors. It could happen. I've heard of cases where they've been snatched whether it be minors or adults where they've been snatched or they thought they were going on a date and they go on a date and then all of a sudden they're drugged and ended up in a different state. They could end up being at school. Like they sometimes have an individual who they call the bottom, which the bottom is someone they trust to lure that person in. And it's usually a female. Most of the time it's a female who works for that person. And that person can be in the school and they look like a normal teenager that goes to school and they lure girls in. And that's an easy target right there. - I just wanna like time in and say but you made a really great point because the things that we see on media, the things that we see on TV shows where it's like kidnapping, yes, it does happen. But it's a misconception that we have that, that's the only way human trafficking happens, because definitely these other recruitment methods that traffickers use like Joanna says the romantic relationships the someone who they are familiar with, someone who they know. So yeah, it does happen sometimes in these cases of kidnapping where the trafficker does not know the victim but more often than not, there's that connection and that personal relationship to the victim that they use and manipulate to get them to either do labor or sex trafficking. - So it's really they're preying on their trusts. It sounds like. - Yes. - And you know, I know there's a big myth too, right. That, you know, victims, when they're out in public they're going to go and seek help. But that's not always the case because if that were the case, I mean, they're out all the time in different, you know, public settings and they're continuously are being victimized. So why is there that big misconception or that big myth? - I think it's, I'm very familiar with like very... You can say like it's like as similar as domestic violence, right? We say like, "Oh, why don't they get out of the relationship?" Well, there's dependency on that relationship. There's intimidation, there's coercion, all this factors that we don't understand. Some of them are afraid for their own life to leave. And so we wanna make sure that before as advocates before they leave that relationship they're gonna be in a safe place. We can't force them to leave a relationship. And then something happens to them. - And another myth is that this only happens to, you know lower socioeconomic groups, which is really also not the case. It can literally happen to anyone in any group setting. - Yes, definitely. And it can happen to anyone. We do know that majority of the victims the gender is primarily female. However, I do want to throw out there about we do often forget that males can often be victims of

human trafficking as well. And again, whether it's labor or sex trafficking that is not just females who are victims. So yeah, it can definitely happen to anyone, of any age, any gender, again different age. It typically happens when and begins when they're minors but it can definitely happen across the board. - And so can you guys share some, you know some indicators that people like myself or others can look out for to see, or, you know, signs that someone is in need of help or being trafficked. - As far as indicators go, a lot of the things, it's interesting as a parent, there's some indicators that are interesting. Like a lot of the times their parents would take away their phones and they ended up with a different phone every month or they end up with different clothing that their parents never bought them. Sometimes they have a hard time looking at even the eye or asking random questions. When you ask them questions, they don't know how to answer. When a police officer is talking to them they don't know how to answer because they don't have that person next to them where they feel safe. They're very smart. Traffickers are very smart. So they coerce their victims into a manner where they don't speak like, so if there's most of the indicators are like, you know the person that you're talking to and they at least start acting a different way. There's not one indicator but when they start acting a different way or having your clothing, just those are just small indicators. That could be so many indicators depending on that person. - Definitely isolation can be another one. Like if you notice someone, whether it's your youth or a friend who you're with and then suddenly they start like isolate. There's someone new in the picture. Maybe it's a significant other in a relationship. Maybe it's their new friend they've met. And then suddenly they see you start seeing less and less of them. It could be the trafficker trying to isolate the victim away from friends and family to try to gain more power and control over that victim. So they can get them to, again, build that trust and that dependency in that relationship. - Sometimes unfortunately there's also like drug use. And so some teams will start like what you could see like the track marks on their hands and when they never use before, because like we said sometimes they inject them with drugs just to like kind of like make it easier for them to be trafficked. And so that's like a really hard thing to deal with. Also when they're minors and they have STDs like that's a huge red flag right there. - And some of the physical, some other physical signs, that parents, or even friends can look out for, unexplained bruises and different stages of healing, right. Because domestic violence and assault are part of being trafficked. Some emotional abuse as well, being confused or disoriented like you guys said with the drugging, are those individuals stopping school. Being just disconnected from family and friends? - Yes, definitely. - And so how do... What is the role of the Rape Crisis Center for those that are needing help with being trafficked? So the role of the Rape Crisis Center is we definitely want to build their trust. So as an advocate, I can definitely say that sometimes clients don't wanna go into therapy right away because they're not gonna trust their counselor sometimes, and sometimes they'll want that. It's just depends on the stage that they're at. But just kind of gaining their trust back. Seeing if they want to get counseling, rebuilding those bonds that they've broken throughout this relationship with their trafficker. But definitely the key point is trust, seeing what they need. - And so what is the process of, you know seeking help through the center? Yeah, so we have our hotline, which is 24/7. And so it's usually

sometimes the human trafficking hotline we'll call it and just kind of refer clients to us. And our number's 210-349-7273. They definitely can talk there and request an advocate. They can use that as an emotional support if they're not ready to seek services right away because everybody's at a different stage. Like I said, we don't want to pull them away in a place where they're unsafe. And so that could be definitely the first stage just calling a hotline having someone to talk to building that trust, connection. Now, definitely after that, then it becomes an advocate. We can definitely continue with that process and they can receive benefits. A lot of human trafficking victims have free counseling services because they were trafficked. It's a crime against the victim. And so there's a lot of services out there that not necessarily just a Rape Crisis Center but other agencies as an advocate we seek to see what they need. - So you guys would be a great starting point for any individual. And then you guys can connect them to the right resource if they need additional services. - Yes definitely. - Okay, and. I want everyone to be aware that the 960 a Cyberspace Wing is hosting a 40km, again that's connecting, you know the 40.3 million victims a year that are being trafficked. So we're doing a 40 km in the month of January. 40 km your way. So if you wanna, you know walk a couple miles or run a couple miles a day any way to get a 40 km in and a 40 km equates to 24.8 miles. So for those that do not run marathons I don't suggest you wait till the last day. (Laughs) to do that. But, you know, we're trying to spread awareness on you know, this... This crime that sweeping, you know, America. And I don't think people realize this is like a billion dollar crime or a billion dollar industry. - Yeah, it definitely is. And, you know, speaking of that it's actually more profitable. You know, you hear a lot about drug trafficking but human trafficking is more profitable, market unfortunately. And why is it? It's because they can buy an individual for one time and then use that individual multiple times to fill out, you know, whatever they're trying to traffic or whether it's labor or sex. Whereas in the drug trafficking, you know, you buy your product and then you sell your product. And then you're out of product. Unfortunately, with human trafficking, once you buy the girl or the victim the traffickers can use them multiple times for a length of period, which is very unfortunate, but yeah, it does happen. It is profitable. Unfortunately, there does need to be an increase of awareness in it. And so also part of what we do at the Rape Crisis Center and part of my job as an education coordinator is to kind of go out into the community and host. Right now where it's free and they're virtual trainings on what is human trafficking again? What are these red flags and indicators? We talk more about the recruitment methods and things like that. And so we're available if you wanna schedule something for a group of you, or also, if you just wanna come and join, you can just visit our website at rapecrisis.com/events and sign up for any of our trainings regarding that. - Thank you guys so much. Yeah, I do want to let everyone know that on Monday January 11th, it is the blue campaign from the department of Homeland security. They ask everyone to wear blue, to take a photo and with the hash tag wear blue day and in trafficking. Again to spread awareness. So I challenge all of you gladiators to do that on Monday, January 11th. To report a suspect or to report a suspect human trafficking to federal law enforcement call (866) 347-2423. To get help from the National Human Trafficking hotline. You can call 888-373-7888 or text help to be free at 233-733. So I really want to thank you

ladies for joining us today. You really helped us to get some more information on human trafficking and you know, those that are in need to get help. - Definitely, thank you for having us and spreading awareness. I know that there is a lot of word out there that human trafficking is growing, but there's still a lot of under-reporting. And so we hope that with help of others and just spreading that awareness, there could be more reporting. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. - I look forward to, you know, future education, pieces with you guys. Gladiators thank you for listening to today's episode. Gladiators out. (Upbeat music)